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ABSTRACT

Suggesting that all students are capable of learning and can achieve high levels of competency when teachers delineate their expectations, this digest focuses on Outcome-Based Education (OBE) in the language arts classroom. The digest delineates some of the tenets of OBE, including the necessity of clearly defined objectives, students having choices and options, and instructional levels determined after assessment of student mastery. The digest also discusses creating a community of readers and writers, ongoing assessment by students and instructors, and replacement of textbooks with tradebooks and authentic materials. The digest also imparts discussion of three secrets of success of an outcome-based education program: (1) attempt to have all staff in concert with the tenets of the program; (2) continue to conference with content area teachers; and (3) success is contagious. (RS)

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From Theory to Practice: Classroom Application of Outcome-Based Education

by Janet Battistini

This digest will focus on Outcome-Based Education in the language arts classroom. Though Outcome-Based Education must involve administrators, educators, parents and students, ultimately it is the classroom teacher who is the key to the success of the program. The most basic premise of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) states that all students are capable of learning and can achieve high levels of competency when teachers delineate their expectations. When this is done, students feel they are participants in classroom decisions and tend to be more supportive of all aspects of the class. Thus, one of the main objectives of OBE is met as students and staff both take responsibility for successful learning outcomes.

Any teacher involved with OBE must be able to evaluate the effectiveness of his/her classroom experience implementing OBE. The following list delineates some of the tenets of OBE, and this Digest will demonstrate how some of these tenets are utilized in the language arts/reading classroom:

- Both staff and students take responsibility for successful learning.
- Objectives are clearly defined.
- Students have choices and options, thus they usually perform at higher levels of competency.
- Instructional levels are determined after complete assessment of student mastery.
- Students are given the opportunity to gain from others and to build a hierarchy of learning skills.
- Evaluation by both peers and instructors is ongoing.
- Time is varied for learning according to the needs of each student and the complexity of the task.
- Students are given the opportunity to work with core and alternative curriculum.
- All students are ensured the opportunity for personal success.

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CREATING A COMMUNITY OF READERS AND WRITERS

Throughout the course the instructor must make a sincere attempt to meet each student at his/her level of competency and build upon the strengths already there. The first week a profile of reading/writing strengths of each student is created. This is done in a nonthreatening manner and is personalized as much as possible. Students are tested with the revised Gates-MacGinite Reading Tests—Vocabulary and Comprehension. In addition, students produce a writing sample in the classroom while listening to classical music.

As part of the profile, students complete two different interest inventories. Students also write a brief biography at this time and share these with a small group. By the end of the first several days of the course, students have clear objectives of the program, a classroom climate of mutual respect has been built, and the teacher has a great deal of information about each student. At this juncture there is a completed assessment of student mastery in varied areas, and one can determine where instructional levels will begin.

ONGOING ASSESSMENT BY STUDENTS AND INSTRUCTORS

An area in the language arts/reading programs where ongoing assessment is of great value is in peer editing and teacher conferences. To teach reading and writing in a comprehensive manner, the teacher must realize that not all students will be working on the same activity during the same time. Varying the time for learning according to the needs of each student and the complexity of the task are especially apparent in the writing process. Student intervention with a specific writing partner or small group will give the necessary feedback.

While peer editing is essential, teacher conferences are a significant feature of the writing process. Students feel very special as the instructor focuses all his/her attention on the student and the writing. When conferencing with students it is important to distinguish at least two areas of expertise and two areas for

improvement on a given assignment. The instructor should keep written notes on the writing details, and the student needs to keep written verification of these notes. Thus both teacher and student know where the student needs instruction, and the teacher can easily and accurately check for mastery of this objective in the next writing piece. Students keep their writing in a portfolio and select representative work for the portfolio with the input of the instructor as well as that of other students.

THE WORLD IS A TEXTBOOK

It is significant to note that a textbook is not used for these classes. A regular textbook would bring a sense of confinement, and it is preferable to use trade books and authentic materials from the world around the students. Each year units of study that meet the changing needs of the student population are developed and integrated into the curricula. Past units have included socioeconomic issues, ecology, and music and its role in the life of teenagers. In this manner one can build upon the interests of the students and individualize their classroom experience.

Integral to this program is the completion of projects, reports, and group activities rather than a myriad of summative tests. These evaluations are usually a better assessment of a student's thoughts. The projects are often open-ended, giving the students freedom to explore whatever their interests and abilities lead them to.

SECRETS OF SUCCESS OF AN OUTCOME-BASED EDUCATION PROGRAM

- Attempt to have your total staff in concert with the tenets of your program. Teachers need updated education and are usually open to new ideas and will implement them if they feel significant support from administration and other staff members. Plan a day-long program at the outset for introducing and educating the staff with the objectives of your resolve. Speakers for our staff development programs have included both outside presenters and our own personnel. Sometimes outside presenters have a wide appeal and bring a fresh approach to a given subject. Our program has been effective for many reasons, but one is the direct input of the staff in deciding what they want in terms of staff development.
- Continue to conference with content area teachers. Because language arts is the basis for all other disciplines, continue to make yourself available to other staff members for support and assistance with specific areas of Outcome-Based Education. Some staff members will need more direction as new concepts are introduced and implemented. Become familiar with the texts used by other departments, and you will be able to offer assistance as new ideas are implemented.
- Success is contagious, and others will see the benefits of the program and be more eager to share their concerns and ideas with you. Sometimes it is beneficial to begin with just a few new ideas, and then as a comfort zone is established, the more dramatic steps can be taken.

Not every time a class meets will it incorporate all aspects of OBE. However, by focusing on the growth and progress of the individual student, one usually sees a pattern of success. Mutual trust is built from the first day of the course and carries through to every aspect of the classroom experience. Every class has a personality of its own, and the unique chemistry of students and instructors learning and teaching with common goals is a form of achievement that cannot easily be measured. The long-term effects of competent teachers interacting with motivated students is never really known. However, one can identify when short-term goals have been met. Such successes of student-teacher cooperation and achievement have greatly enhanced the effectiveness of many using these objectives.

For additional information, consult the following sources:

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